

“WHERE is Jesus?” Rev. Jane Courtright

The widow of Nain, the Gospel story just shared:

Can YOU picture the scene?

“ A man who had died was being carried out.

He was his mother’s ONLY son, & she was a widow.”

Can YOU picture it! Can you feel her anguish,

Her hopelessness, her helplessness?

SHE IS ALONE.

We know her, don’t we?

We’ve stood beside many like her,

Even as each one is unique:

Widows & widowers, sons & daughters, mother & fathers,  
grandsons & grandmothers, good & true friends.

We have seen her, stood beside her,

sometimes we have BEEN her.

I have known her, from more than 25 years of doing funerals  
standing on hard or muddy cemetery ground.

I have known her, seen her, stood beside her,  
in many different situations.

But none stand out today, in this story of Nain,  
as the father I remember so well

in a cemetery on a desolate day in Byron, Il..

There I saw the father’s crumpled face.

I heard his silent tears as the wind blew hard,

And I tried to read the psalm:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures...”

Only there were no green pastures in sight that day,  
only the death & a heart crying out in pain.

Even now, I remember it all ... painfully and clearly.

It all began when I received a phone call from the other pastor at the church.  
He said the Gibson Family had been injured  
when their car was hit by a drunk driver.

We agreed to meet at the hospital asap.  
We met and split up at the hospital – I went to hold the mother,  
as they peeled much of her injured skin from her back  
and start to attend to her other injuries.  
Oh, the physical pain & the anguish of wondering  
how her children had fared in the crash.

Later, I stood in the ICU with John, her father, as Kory,  
their 6 yr. old daughter laid, close to death, then brain dead.  
John and I had no words, only tears.

I learned that John and his young son were not injured physically,  
Because the drunk driver had hit the right hand,  
passenger side of the car.  
Kory had her seat belt on, but was leaning, sleeping,  
against the door in the back seat.  
Her mother was in the passenger front seat.

The Gibsons were members of the UCC Church in Byron  
For most of my seven years there as Pastor.  
Kori was a Sunday School child, a Rainbow Kid  
& a sparkling joy who danced in & out of my office regularly.  
She was the apple of her father's eye, & a loving twinkle in my life!

Though Kori was braindead, she was kept alive even longer.  
I camped out in the waiting room with her family & friend  
as the doctors harvested her organs  
to save or enhance another person's life.  
It was a TOUGH night in that waiting room, but we were together.

We pastors decided to do Kori's funeral service together.  
As you can imagine, it was a HUGE service,  
with family, extended family, church family,

children & teachers, and community at large.

This was when I began my practice of doing children's messages  
at funerals...to talk with any children present.

It was a beautiful, sad, poignant time.

I visited with the Gibson family many times after that...  
until my time at that church ended.

Kori's mom healed fast physically.

John & I shared long, agonizing conversations  
about life and death and unfairness.

This accident was not a part of his plan for their family.

WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

Often he would look at me with sad, numb eyes, wanting answers.

I wished I'd had answers for him.

We never found the answers to most of those questions.

In the Biblical story of the widow of Nain,  
Jesus had compassion for the widow  
& brought her son back to life.

"Do not weep," he told her.

Then he touched the funeral platform,  
and said to the young man, "I say to you, get up!"

The dead man sat up and began to speak,  
.....Jesus gave him back to his mother.

John Gibson wanted to know where Jesus was when Kory died.

I sat quietly before such questions.

You see, all of our stories of gravesides known and felt  
are blunt reminders of the shortness, frailty & fickleness of life.

As time wore on, the realities of life tugged John  
back into the world he didn't understand, but needed to live in.

Eventually, he & his wife Nanette had another child.

When I heard of this new life, my heart sang with them.

Oh, I still remembered the deep silent tears of the ICU,  
of the hospital waiting room, of the funeral afterward.  
But now I heard a new cry coming from John's  
broken, but healing heart, "GOD HAS PROMISED...."

Still, where WAS Jesus THAT time?  
Standing in the harsh reality of death,  
it is a question we might well ask.  
The reality of death is a reality we all share.  
We will all die someday.  
We will all face the reality of our friend's & family's deaths.  
We may also ask, "Where is Jesus THIS time?"

But....there is more to tell!  
You see, if our stories of birth, life, struggle and death  
were the only stories to be told,  
life would just be a series of ups & downs....  
with little, if any hope to feel or hold onto.

There IS another story-  
a story that surrounds ours, in word and water, in baptism.  
Now, in the anguish of lost loved ones & hopelessness,  
now, in our story's seeming end, we can see that  
Death is not the end of any story. There are no ends in our universe.  
Really, within the images about death and new life in our Bible,  
the only truths I see, are that after this life,  
we will be with or a part of God, and it will be GOOD.

It's this hope that gives us the courage to finally say goodbye to loved ones.

Where is Jesus in all this?  
I like how Elie Wiesel, survivor of the Holocaust answered a question put to him,  
"How can you still believe in God?  
Where was God when all this was happening?"  
Wiesel answered, "God was in the tears of the suffering.."

Where is Jesus? In the hope offered to us in unanswerable questions.  
John Gibson will never know why he lived while Kory  
Died at the hands of a drunken driver.  
But John discovered that he had love to share with other children.

So do we, sisters and brothers in Christ. **SO DO WE.** Amen.